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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
*Extension Service*, WASHINGTON 25, D.C.



# VICTORY FARM VOLUNTEERS

November 1, 1946

For your information

TO ALL ASSISTANT STATE FARM LABOR SUPERVISORS, VFV:

Subject: News Letter

## WESTWARD FLIGHT

The miracle of air travel provided me a brief but significant visit to the potato harvest in Idaho and the sugar beet harvest in Utah during mid-October. Chief impression from the trip: The importance of wise program planning in adjusting school schedules for crop harvests. It appears again that these two States would have rough going in their autumn harvests without school-age youngsters.

For instance, about 65 percent of Idaho's potatoes are picked up by youth. And youth harvest something like 80 percent of Utah's sugar beets. But more about this trip west later.

## WHAT ABOUT DAY-HAULS?

In thinking about 1947 the subject of youth day-hauls keeps looming up. Some of the questions that keep recurring:

Are not our youth day-hauls more in need of refinement and improvement than any other phase of the VFV program? Are not a large part of our youth day-hauls going to fields and orchards with little or no concern on the part of Extension? Should Extension be concerned? Are transportation, safety, and working conditions bad enough to have an unfavorable effect on the over-all youth labor supply. Even if Extension exerted more widespread control, what are we really able to do about under-age workers, too-long work hours, unfit transportation to fields, lack of supervision, and under-par safety measures?

If we minimized the tremendous improvements already brought about by Extension in these daily hauls of youth, we should misrepresent the truth. The fact is that the farm labor shortage itself and Extension's role in alleviating it have been mighty potent factors in correcting some of the evils in agriculture's use of youth labor. Progress along this line is really one of the best stories we have to tell about the Extension farm labor program.

Yet perhaps we haven't gone far enough. Among other things, we are woefully lacking in information about some day-hauls, especially where Extension has had no part. In many areas we just don't know what age youth are being picked up, what kind of arrangements farmers have with the youngsters, how long they're working, what kind of trucks are used, whether drinking water and sanitary facilities are provided, and what kind of treatment youth are getting while at work. This winter might be a good time to round up some of these facts; then we can determine where and how Extension should make an effort toward improvement.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

New York made this type of survey in 1945. We mentioned it in the last news letter, dated October 1. The State department of Extension cooperated with other agencies in the follow-up educational program conducted this past summer which attempted to increase compliance with State child labor laws and bring about other day-haul improvements.

New York's educational approach was based on the assumption that growers must first be familiar with the law and be given some assistance in complying before they can be expected to conform.

New York's situation is unique in that on its statute books there is a 30-year-old child labor law, never strictly enforced. This summer's educational program was carried farther than the minimum age phase. Growers get help from day-haul assistants on supervision, discipline, and training.

Whether education offers any real solution may be questioned by some of you. New York feels that its program "was quite successful," in the words of T. N. Hurd, of Cornell University, who headed the committee in charge. Hurd says they are not ready to release an official summary of the program, but he thinks "we had good cooperation from farmers" although "we did not have complete elimination of illegal employment, by any means."

#### ANOTHER BIG YEAR?

It's a little early to talk about 1947. Or maybe it's not. At any rate, we know at least six States that expect to use as many or more youth next year as in 1946. That's what we gleaned from the remarks of the State farm labor supervisors who were in Washington recently to attend the Federal farm labor staff's quarterly conference.

A few of the comments: Georgia will need as many or more youth to get the job done next year....Indiana may use more boys and girls...."nearly the same number of youth" for Pennsylvania....Oregon will continue its well-organized platoon program for youngsters, but numbers may run only 80 or 90 percent of this year....Utah and Connecticut supervisors look for big needs for youth again in 1947. Connecticut expects high industrialization to make farm labor scarce.

#### VISIT FROM A "DOWN-EASTER"

We were glad to have John Downing, Maine's VFV supervisor, for a visitor last week.

John was on his way back nor'east after accompanying Kentucky workers home from the Aroostook potato harvest.

A few of John's comments in the course of our conversation on the values of farm work for young people: "In Maine, youth harvest some 90 percent of the snap beans."...."Farming offers such a variety of experiences for youth that many phases of agriculture may be introduced to them for consideration as a career--rural economics, marketing, building trades, electricity, etc."...."I usually tell our schoolmen not to consider low grades as a qualification for farm work. The brighter the kid the more he gets out of farm experience."

#### BANGOR RADIO AND VFV

Something new on the horizon is a regular weekly VFV radio program. If it's ever been tried before, we hadn't heard about it. And so we were especially interested in Downing's description of his program over Station WABI in Bangor, Maine. He does a 9-minute program each Monday at 1 pm.

And this is significant: Here's also one of the first Extension radio programs we know about beamed especially to urban listeners. Forward-looking Extension people are talking these days about Extension's responsibility to suburban and city residents. But in most States there had been little opportunity to put this new viewpoint into practice. At any rate, we VFV folks have had rather frequent contacts with urban people--parents, school people, youngsters, and the like.

Downing takes advantage of this opportunity on the Bangor station, he tells us, to impart not only the VFV story but other phases of the farm labor program, rural problems, agriculture's point of view, and the fine aspects of country living to his city audience.

TO CLOSE OR NOT TO CLOSE

In the last news letter, we ventured on the controversial subject of school harvest vacations in the fall. And my trip to Idaho and Utah has certainly interested me further in the subject, one as vital to school people as to farm labor folks.

The question boils down to whether to close schools lock, stock, and barrel--or keep them open and dismiss only those youngsters who work. School boards and principals will make the final decision, but Extension still is vitally concerned. Strangely enough, I find evidence in these Western States indicating that the complete closing of school doesn't necessarily assure a big labor supply for growers.

Here's the way they do it in two school districts of Salt Lake County, Utah. Instead of closing school, they dismiss those youth who work, for a specified 2-week period. In one district, the schools' director of pupil personnel checks with the farmers on names of youth working; in the other, youth submit work excuses signed by parent and employer. In both districts, the pupils are assured that they will not have to make up work missed. While they are out of class, those remaining in school will be doing work supplementary to that already covered and will not proceed further in the course of study. Naturally, when given a choice between working with pay and remaining in school, a greater number of boys and girls will engage in the beet harvest than when schools are closed. When the choice is vacation or work, many youngsters will elect to take it easy. That's the line of reasoning they take in this Utah county--and they can document it.

For example, out of 2,267 junior and high school students dismissed in the district when schools closed for a harvest vacation in 1945, just 355 did farm work. That's some kind of proof that closing schools isn't always the answer to the farmer's prayers. As a result of this record last year, the same district excused individual pupils this fall without closing schools--and now considers its beet harvest labor problem solved.

Another case in point--the complete closing of schools in Idaho this fall--as many States do it in big harvest areas--has not provided all the labor farmers need in potatoes. Idaho finds that many high school youngsters just aren't working in potatoes, even though they are out of school. Apparently they don't need the money, and there's not the patriotic incentive this year.

WAGES, HOURS, TRANSPORTATION

work an 8-hour day and make good wages again this year.

Even so, Idaho youngsters are doing a big job in potatoes, harvesting some 65 percent of the crop, as I said before. They

We got some excellent pictures of the potato harvest and youth's part in it during my Idaho visit. They were taken by a commercial photographer, arrangements having been made by R. K. Pierson.

Utah youngsters are working from  $6\frac{1}{2}$  to 8 hours a day in sugar beets. Many of them make from \$6 to \$7 a day. In one school district, school busses take youth to a central point where farmers pick them up. The school board makes the busses available each morning as soon as those still in school are transported.

THIS SMALL WORLD

one evening I saw both Fred Colby, Tennessee's farm labor supervisor, and W. O. Stark, Kansas' VFV supervisor. Both men had accompanied interstate workers to Idaho.

EAST LANSING PUBLICATION

Doris Shimkus' VFV newspaper is off the press and goes to all Michigan VFV's. We received a copy of this mimeographed publication--something new in the Michigan program--and I especially noted the two illustrations on the front page. One pictures a city skyline, the other is a farm scene. As usual in a VFV newspaper, one of the most interesting features is the letters from the youth themselves about their farm experiences.

FROM THE PRESS

"Emergency Work on Farms"--editorial in The Wilkes-Barre, Pa., Times-Leader, August 12, pointing out that "useful manual work in the open increases vitality, makes strong muscles and sturdy limbs.... It's a good thing all around."

"Changes Urged in Education System of Utah"--news article in the Salt Lake Tribune, October 15. Here's the lead paragraph:

"On the theory that all school and no work makes a boy without 'Jack'--and very little practical experience--Dr. E. Allen Bateman, State superintendent of public instruction, Monday posed the question, 'Should high school students be required to work at a paying job as part of their educational process?'"

Sincerely,

Irvin H. Schmitt, Chief  
Victory Farm Volunteers Division  
Extension Farm Labor Program

(Copy to State supervisor,  
directors, editors)

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